

**34B\* THE TIMELESS PSALMS:  
A CALL TO WORSHIP  
Easter 4B 2018  
PSALM 23**

God of hope, we come together from our isolation to share in worship of you.  
**Gentle Shepherd, you carry the vulnerable ones in his arms, so we thank you.**

God of comfort, we come together with our own pain and regrets, to praise you.  
**Tender Shepherd of all the sheep and goats, we come to receive your blessings.**

God of new beginnings, we come together in trust, faith and hope to share in a community, where worship of God is central to our spiritual nurture and growth.  
**Welcoming Shepherd of the sheepfold, you never turn your back on us, but invite us into your Holy Presence for the healing of our wounds and to meet all our needs - while offering us compassionate care; and so we revere your Holy Name. Amen.**

**PSALM 23**

A psalm of David.

1 The LORD is my shepherd;  
I have all that I need.

2 He lets me rest in green meadows;  
he leads me beside peaceful streams.

3 He renews my strength.  
He guides me along right paths,  
bringing honour to his name.

4 Even when I walk  
through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid,  
for you are close beside me.  
Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

5 You prepare a feast for me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You honour me by anointing my head with oil.  
My cup overflows with blessings.

6 Surely your goodness and unfailing love  
will pursue me all the days of my life,  
and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

**PRAYERS OF TRUST & THANKS:  
EASTER 4B 2018  
PSALM 23**

God of hope, we come together from our isolated and solitary lives to share in worship of you. We give thanks for those shared experiences, as they linger in our minds when we are feeling 'low'. At times in life, we choose our seclusion; but other times we have no choice but to be alone - and not always happy about that aloneness. We give thanks that you are always with us, especially in those difficult times; giving us the heart's ease we so desperately need. We give thanks that the arms of our Gentle Shepherd are trustworthy; caring for all vulnerable people; and carrying us in love and into God's peace.

God of comfort, we come together with all our pain and regrets; our disappointments and our fears – real or imagined; and we come with a sincere desire to praise you for your accepting love. We are a very mixed group of people gathered here for worship with many needs; and we are here with you, our Tender Shepherd, to receive your blessings and love. We could so easily be described as a group of sheep and goats - all together with our own special needs and our own challenges. We give thanks that God does not differentiate between us, with anyone being more deserving than any others. Comforting and Tender God, we bless and thank you for the gift of trust, and we rejoice that we can trust our God!

Welcoming Shepherd of the sheepfold, you never turn your back on us, but invite us into your Holy Presence for the healing of our wounds and to meet all our needs, while offering us your compassionate care; and so we revere your Holy Name. God of new beginnings, we come together in trust, faith and hope, to share in a community where worship of God is central to our spiritual nurture and growth. Enrich and inspire our worship, so that we all bring honour to the name of our God; the Good Shepherd, who loves everyone in the flock. Amen.

**A PERSONAL MEDITATION:  
EASTER 4B 2018  
PSALM 23**

For this meditation on Psalm 23, I will attempt to react and respond to the words as I am blessed by and with them. I will be using the NRSV translation. [1] **“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.”** The opening words are a personal faith statement—*God is in a personal relationship with me, and whether it is “God” or “The LORD” is not important to me – as they are the same One Holy Being.* If God is my shepherd, that makes me a stupid and irresponsible sheep – but the relationship is what matters most to me. **“He makes me lie down in green pastures;”** I think that the region to which this psalm applies was often very arid and not good grazing land; and so the luxury of resting in *“green pastures”* would be every sheep’s idea of heaven! **“he leads me beside still waters;”** “Still” waters are those with no inlet or outlet; and therefore are often brackish or polluted; and note that the shepherd takes the sheep beside the still water, not through it. That was an experienced and wise shepherd! **“he restores my soul.”** If we think of ‘soul’ as being that inner ‘me’ and the very essence of who I am; the concept of God restoring, renewing or reviving my inner ‘me’ is a challenging thought – for in what way has my inner ‘me’ let me down or failed? Has the apparent failure of my soul to do with priorities; relationships with God and/or others; or is it just an unrecognised drifting away from all that I once thought that was central to being ‘me’?

Creative pause:           Is it *“I shall not want”* OR *“I shall not be needy”*?

**“He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.”** I understand this to mean being led along a ‘godly’ way of life. I think that walking in the right way *“for his name’s sake”* means that as carry Christ’s name as a Christian, we dishonour him when we fail. **“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me;”** I think the *“darkest valley”* means an imminent threat of death, disease or disaster; and that God’s Holy Presence with me supports me through those “feared” outcomes. In addition, I think this is linked with the next selection - **“your rod and your staff - they comfort me.”** God’s Holy Presence with me has equipped me with the necessary tools to help me deal with the challenges of life and death; just as the shepherd had his tools of a rod and staff to deal with any unexpected threats. My role in any challenges is to use the tools and to believe that whatever is the outcome – I will not have to deal with them without God’s help.

Creative pause:           *“Your rod and your staff - they comfort me.”*

**“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;”** From my study of the lives of those long-ago shepherds, it seems as if they were often loners; people who were rejected or misunderstood; and that those shepherds cherished their isolation, the quietness of their surroundings; and the very real opportunity as shepherds to *‘do their own thing’*. If that was so, it would be their worst nightmare having to dine with their so-called *“enemies”*; and be expected to mix with and communicate with strangers who ignored them—in favour of having a ‘good party time’. God’s gracious welcome and acceptance of those shepherds would have been a great blessing to them. **“you anoint my head with oil;”** This continues the theme of a welcome and their acceptance by God, as the anointing with oil was an hospitable pledge of acceptance by any host; and that no one was turned away from God’s front door! **“my cup overflows.”** Although the shepherd’s life was hard and lonely, there was also a freedom and tranquillity of the spirit most of the time, as they looked after the sheep – gaining pleasure from their daily and nightly experiences – and therefore, their life, was so fulfilled it overflowed! **“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,”** Those fulfilled shepherds had all they wanted and needed – and life was good for them despite the dangers involved in being a shepherd. **“and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.”** As shepherds, they could not be attend any official services of worship as they were always ritually unclean – so their ‘temple’ was the great outdoors, where they could at any time with joy, commune with their God and Creator.

Creative pause:           *“You anoint my head with oil;”*

[1] New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible,  
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